



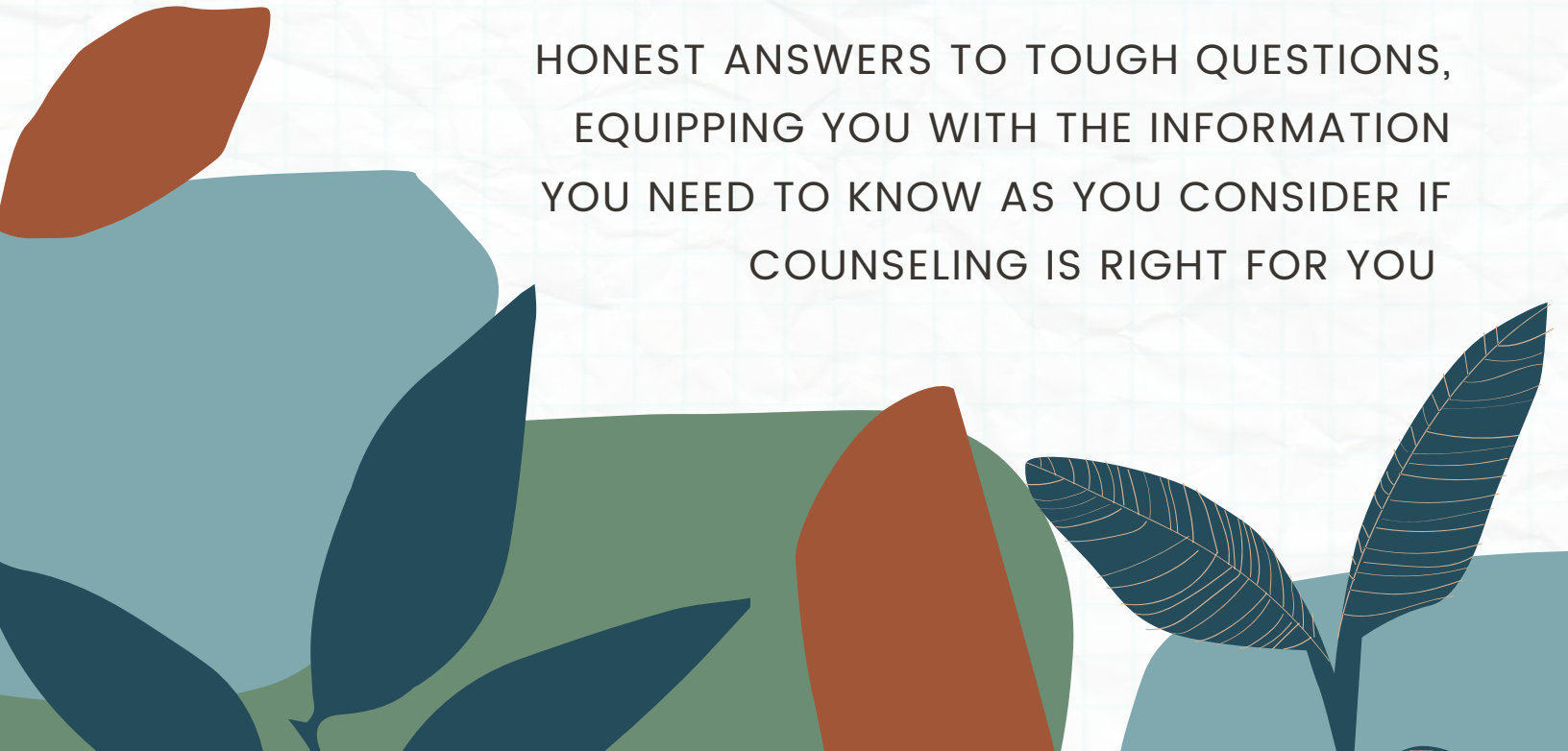
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COUNSELOR | LIFE + CAREER

Counseling Demystified

**LICENSED COUNSELOR
SPILLS THE TEA**

HONEST ANSWERS TO TOUGH QUESTIONS,
EQUIPPING YOU WITH THE INFORMATION
YOU NEED TO KNOW AS YOU CONSIDER IF
COUNSELING IS RIGHT FOR YOU





Counseling Demystified

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1) AM I AT THE POINT WHERE I NEED SUPPORT, OR CAN I GET BY WITHOUT IT?

This question can keep a lot of folks on the fence as they consider going to counseling. Therapy is often considered a last resort after other self-help strategies have failed. I think a lot of the apprehension about exploring counseling stems from the stereotypical idea of therapy. You know the one...

You're lying on a couch, looking at the ceiling, and talking about a painful childhood experience. Meanwhile, your therapist (who's wearing large plastic-rimmed glasses and a big, brown cardigan) feverishly writes down how you're broken inside because your parents didn't love you enough.

I'm here to tell you that things have changed. In a world where we're hyperaware of others and expected to pivot based on the needs of those around us, counseling is often the only hour people get that's just for them. It's the one hour where you get to explore the challenges you've faced and the worries you're experiencing with someone who is nonjudgmental and objective.

Counseling can be an amazing experience for those who look like they have it all together on the outside but internally struggle with tough feelings that keep them from fully enjoying life. Are there difficult feelings or thoughts that keep coming up for you? Maybe you have good weeks and it's easier to ignore them, but when things become challenging, do the same difficult feelings or thoughts surface? That's reason enough to consider counseling.





2) WILL I HAVE TO TALK ABOUT THINGS I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

This is a concern that's often not brought up, but can linger in someone's mind as they consider if counseling is right for them. I can tell you that your counselor will not force you to talk about anything you don't want to talk about. And if they bring up something you don't want to discuss, ***you have every right to say you don't want to talk about it.*** This is your time, this is your investment, and you get to choose what you talk about and what you don't talk about.

3) WILL I BE JUDGED BY MY COUNSELOR?

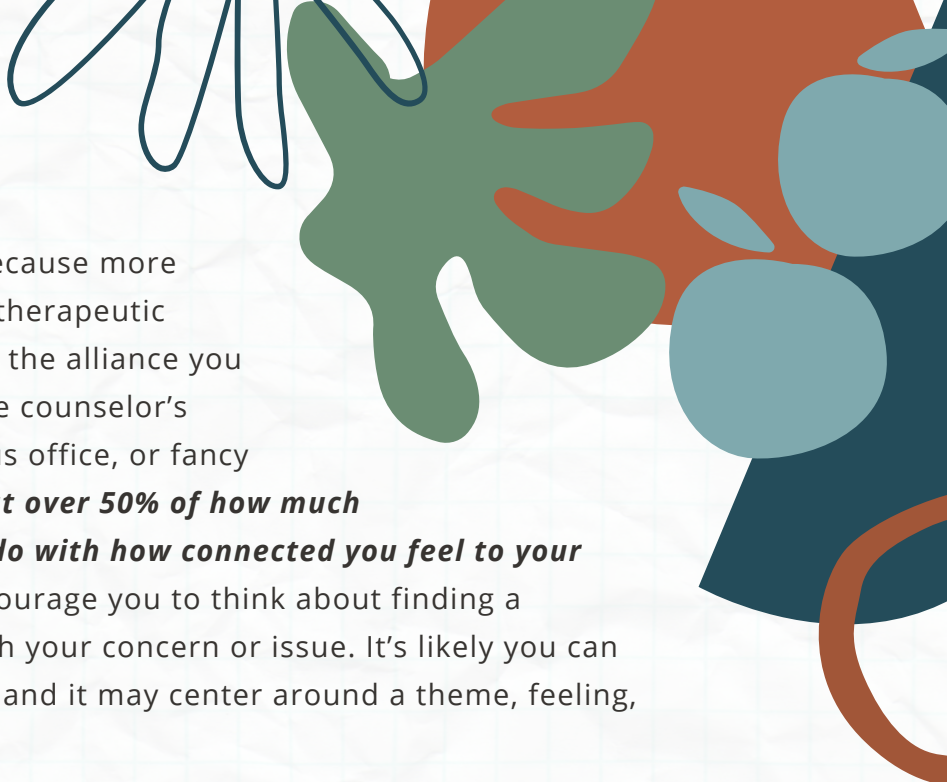
The idea of someone listening to your insecurities and processing your biggest fears is daunting. A lot of people come into therapy thinking their counselor is some enlightened being or that they have it all together, but that's not the case. It's more like I'm climbing my mountain over here and you're climbing your mountain over there. And where I am on my mountain, I can see things you can't, like if there's an alternative pathway you can take or an avalanche that's about to come down.

I'd hate for you to think that I've reached the top of my mountain and now I'm looking down on you. The truth is, I'm still climbing, making mistakes, and learning about myself along the way. Basically, we're the same. We're all climbing our mountain until the day we die. But here's the thing: you can get better and better at climbing, and better and better at learning to appreciate the journey. Counseling is a place where you can explore what makes you tick with someone who is truly curious about you and who will encourage you to try new ways of thinking and behaving so that you can move forward and enjoy the life you've worked so hard to create.

4) HOW DO I START EXPLORING WHAT I WANT IN A COUNSELOR?

There are so many wonderful counselors out there, but sometimes it's hard to know how to find one that's right for you. The idea of picking the wrong one can cause analysis paralysis.






Picking the right counselor is vital because more than half of what you get out of the therapeutic process has to do with the quality of the alliance you form with your counselor. It's not the counselor's theoretical orientation, their fabulous office, or fancy credentials. **Research has shown that over 50% of how much you'll get out of the process has to do with how connected you feel to your counselor.** With that in mind, I'd encourage you to think about finding a counselor who works specifically with your concern or issue. It's likely you can pinpoint what you're struggling with and it may center around a theme, feeling, or life transition.

Also, when you find a counselor that specializes in what you're experiencing and how you'd like to grow, it likely means that counselor has been very successful in working with those kinds of clients. What's your challenge? How do you want to grow? Start with that and fill in the rest of the puzzle.

5) HOW DO I FIND MY IDEAL COUNSELOR?

- **Referrals.** If you're comfortable, ask your trusted friends who they recommend. Since they are your friends, it's likely you have things in common: similar lifestyles and challenges. Do they see a counselor? If so, for what? What do they like about them? How does their counselor make them feel?
- **Online Directories.** There are a ton of therapist directories and they allow you to search for counselors based on location, issue, and background. Here are a couple big ones to help you get started: [Therapy Den](#) and [Psychology Today](#). Counselors can only practice in states where they're licensed, so I recommend first filtering counselors based on the reason you're coming into counseling, and then filtering by state if you're open to online sessions.
- **Counselors.** This may seem like an odd suggestion, but counselors can be a great referral source. Many of them own their own private practice, and since they're only one person, they have a limit to how many people they can serve. This is why many of them network with their community in an attempt to find like-minded counselors so they can ensure people get the help they need, even if it's not with them.





Is there a counselor's website you really like? Does their content speak to you in ways that make you feel understood and hopeful? Reach out to them and if they don't have availability, ask them for some referral sources they trust. Let them do some of the research for you.

6) CAN I INTERVIEW A COUNSELOR TO GAUGE OUR FIT? WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD YOU ASK?

If a counselor offers a phone consultation, I highly recommend opting in for the service to see how the two of you connect. If they don't openly offer phone consults on their website, email the counselor and ask for one. And better yet, interview multiple counselors to gauge who is the best fit. To understand what the structure of a phone consultation looks like and how to prepare, you can check out my [Phone Consult Guide](#).

7) HOW LONG DO PEOPLE TYPICALLY GO TO COUNSELING?

I'm going to revisit the *lying on the couch, looking at the ceiling* visual for a minute. Sometimes there's a fear that once people start counseling, they'll be there forever, and when you think about the dent that can have on your bank account, it's understandable that the concern over longevity can hold people back.

I'm often asked how many sessions people have with me until they start to feel better and my response is never clear cut. I have seen people for 3 sessions and they feel like their entire view of the world has shifted. They feel more equipped with the insight and perspective they've gained and are ready to take on the world. I've also had people who've seen me for months or even a year.

It's hard to say at the beginning what your journey will look like, and usually the number of sessions you might need is clearer once we get to know each other more, but what I always relay to my clients is that I promise to never keep you in this relationship longer than you need. My goal is for you to get better and not need me one day. Oftentimes, I am the one that brings up to my clients that they seem to be navigating life's challenges in better ways and maybe they're ready to graduate counseling. It's not a particularly lucrative business strategy, but this is at the heart of most counselors you'll find.



8) HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

A lot of counselors are out-of-network providers.

This means they do not bill insurance for treatment and the cost of counseling is out-of-pocket for clients.

I don't want to get too much on my soapbox as to why this is, but just know that the healthcare system often does not reimburse counselors for their full fee and forces them to spend copious amounts of time on paperwork to ensure they get paid.

Insurance companies also require a DSM diagnosis for treatment. The DSM diagnosis is something a lot of clients don't want on their healthcare record, so they explore other options. When considering an out-of-network provider, the investment can seem daunting, especially if you're considering how long the process might take. Here are some options a lot of out-of-network counseling providers give (including myself):

- Use pre-tax dollars. Did you know that you can use your Health Savings Account (HSA) or Flexible Spending Account (FSA) to pay for counseling or career counseling?
- Some insurance companies may partially reimburse you for out-of-network services. Counselors can provide a "superbill" that you can submit to your insurance company for possible reimbursement. That means you'll pay the session fees at the time of the appointment and, depending on your plan, a certain percentage of that may be paid to you by your insurance company. I recommend calling the customer service number on the back of your insurance card to find out what reimbursement will look like for an out-of-network provider.
- Check if you or your partner has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP is an employee benefit that provides its users with a specified number of sessions or allotted funds. Many times, the EAP can either cover counseling or career counseling.
- Sliding Scale. Many counselors offer a sliding scale or reduced fee rate. How many client slots a counselor has a week oftentimes influences how many reduced fee slots they have. For example, I see 16 clients a week, so I have one reduced fee slot. Other counselors see more clients in a week and this could allow them to offer more sliding scale/reduced fee slots.





9) IS ONLINE COUNSELING LESS EFFECTIVE?

This is a completely understandable question and one that won't be fully satisfied until you experience online sessions. I have had many folks apprehensive about the online aspect of counseling. And I'm here to say that yes, there is SO much that can be gained from being in the physical presence of your counselor. I miss that and I look forward to offering that again one day. On the flip side, many of my clients have expressed how many unforeseen benefits they've gotten from the virtual experience.

- Location Convenience—My clients have shared that being in a familiar space (whether it be their bedroom, office, or car) provides them comfort and results in more open dialogue.
- Time Savings—Because counseling is virtual, clients don't have to allot time for travel back and forth to the session. This allows them to strategically fit in their session and not have to worry about traffic or telling their supervisor that they have to leave early.
- Security—A lot of counselors utilize platforms that are dedicated to keeping your information and sessions safe. No Zoom bombing!
- Technology Adaptability—You don't need any fancy equipment to experience a quality session. Clients have sessions with me while they're on their phone and in their car or home, and I can tell you that the connection we have and the work we do is just as meaningful as if they were in the room. Technology is a wonderful thing.

10) TRUST YOUR INTUITION.

I know, I know. This last one isn't written in the form of a question, but I just wanted to take a moment and express to you that what you're doing takes courage. You're hoping for something better and that's an admirable desire. Trust yourself along this process. Intuition is a powerful tool as you seek to find the right counselor for you.

I hope this feedback helps demystify the counseling process for you and you feel more equipped with some of the answers you are seeking. If you're interested in seeing if we're a good fit, you can find additional information about me on the next page.



*I wish you all the best
on your journey!*



Tamara Clarkson

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INTERESTED IN SCHEDULING A FREE PHONE CONSULT?
YOU CAN FIND ME AT WWW.TAMARACLARKSON.COM